EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ITS RIVALS

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EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ITS RIVALS

A Study of the Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire at the Beginning of our Era

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PREFACE

PART I. of this study was delivered originally as a public lecture at King's College, London, under the title *The Conflict of Hebraism and Hellenism* (1925). Part II. is reprinted from *The Expositor,* August, 1924, and for permission to use it I have to thank Dr. James Moffatt and the publishers. Part III. was delivered as one of a series of lectures at King's College (1923). The appearance of this material in its present form will, it is hoped, be of some use to readers who desire to pursue the subject and to be able to consider it from more than one point of view.

G. H. BOX.

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EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND ITS RIVALS

PART I

The Beginnings of Conflict in the Pre-Christian Period Between Judaism and Hellenism

I

Perhaps there is no more fascinating nor more complicated and difficult set of problems than those which are involved in tracing first of all the emergence, and then the inevitable conflict of Greek culture, on the one hand, and the Jewish religious consciousness, embodied and organized as a religious system which we know as Judaism, on the other. There is a curious parallelism in the history of their development. Just as Greek culture passed through a purely national stage, and then expanded into a world-conquering civilization, so, also, Judaism only emerged as a deposit of the old national life after the organized Hebrew states of North and South Israel had been shattered. It was in the stress and discipline of exile that Judaism

was born—that strange movement that reorganized the remnants of the nation as a Church, on a national basis, inspired with the hope and purpose of restoring the glories of Israel by establishing on the site of the old national home a church-community, which should at once be a rallying spot for the exiles, and a spiritual beacon not only for Israel, but the nations. The most remarkable thing about this programme — so largely idealistic in character—is that, in spite of much disillusionment, especially in the early years of the Restoration period, it ultimately attained a large measure of fulfilment. The persistent and unquenchable faith of the higher souls at last had its reward.

It is not always realized that Judaism, as reorganized in Palestine, was, down to the Maccabean period, a very small and circumscribed organism, painfully striving to hold its own against adverse circumstances. Its expansive power was only attained after the collision with Antiochus Epiphanes, that ardent apostle of Hellenic culture, who, finding the existence of what he regarded as a barbarous cult a nuisance, tried to eliminate the

Jewish religion at a stroke by force, thereby provoking the Maccabean reaction. In the end, he only succeeded in consolidating the thing he desired to destroy. Judaism emerged from the struggle self-conscious and aggressive — in fact, an armed doctrine, equipped with a formidable power of expansion which was fraught with momentous consequences for the world at large.

Paul Wendland, in his famous essay on *Die Hellenistisch-Römische Kultur** remarks that it is not so very long ago that the Hellenistic Age which followed the conquests of Alexander the Great was as much neglected as the period in Jewish history between Ezra and Jesus. So far as the literature of the age was studied at all, its main interest was for philologists searching for material which might elucidate or illuminate for purposes of interpretation the earlier "classical" literature. Now all this has been changed. The artificial barrier which hedged off what was purely "classical" from the age that immediately followed has largely

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* 2nd and 3rd ed., 1912.

been broken down. What is, in fact, a continuous process of history and literary development cannot be artificially bisected in this mechanical fashion. It is realized now, as never before, that the world-significance of Greek culture is first discernible in the Hellenistic period. Hellenism now, for the first time, becomes a factor of world-wide importance. The epoch of late Hellenism was a time of general distintegration. Institutions in political, social, and religious life, which had the prestige of centuries behind them, fell to pieces. The cultural ideal of ancient (classical) Greece had been an encyclopædic one—one man might aspire to compass all departments of knowledge. The new age, with the more exacting standards which followed from the teaching of Plato and Aristotle, developed specialized departments of culture — those of the philosopher, the rhetorician, the grammarian. In political organization the city-state had given place to larger ideals — Panhellenism, and (ultimately in the Roman Empire) imperial absolutism. Contact and intercourse on the part of different races had bred a spirit of cosmopolitan-

ism; the individual had come to his rights (as is shown by the emergence of a new department of literature, that of biography). As regards philosophy, individualism asserted itself in the domain of ethics. Philosophy itself had become intensely serious and democratic in the Cynic propaganda, with its peripatetic beggar-preachers, whose diatribes against the prevailing luxury and immorality deeply impressed the masses of the people. They also proclaimed a more deeply spiritual ideal of religion. The Jewish and (later) Christian propaganda in the Græco-Roman world owed some of its success to the earlier labours of the Cynic preachers of righteousness.

It was in this age of transition and disintegration that Hellenism and Hebraism met for the first time in history. In *Jerusalem under the High Priests* Dr. Edwyn Bevan has brilliantly described the seductive and irresistible attraction of the new culture that followed in the wake of Alexander's advance. New institutions like the gymnasium and the theatre sprang up, new political forms and organizations, a new taste in literature and art —

in short, a whole range of new ideas and interests filled the life of Hellenized cities, beside which the old pre-Hellenic life seemed dull and empty. Greek became the language of the educated, and largely the language generally understood in such cities as Damascus, Tyre, Ascalon, after they had reorganized themselves on the Greek model. Dr. Bevan goes on to remark: "If we had looked round about us there would have been a great deal in the Syrian cities of those days to show us the predominance of the new power. . . . As a building, the gymnasium would have shown us the familiar forms of classical architecture. The new political organization would require new buildings —a hall for the senate and such-like; and the new social life would create the indispensable *stoas,* cool pillared galleries for lounging, and all these would be Greek in form. Dress, too, would be then, as now, inseparable as an outward symbol from the particular form of civilization. . . . We should have seen the *epheboi* of Tyre or Ascalon with their broad-brimmed Greek hat and fluttering chlamys, and the richer men and women not easy

to distinguish by their appearance from their contemporaries in Ephesus or Athens."

Nowhere except in Egypt was Hellenic influence more powerful than on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean. Greek cities abounded in this region during the Hellenic period—Raphia, Gaza, Ascalon, Azotus, Jaffa, Cæsarea, Dor and Ptolemais — while farther east Greek influence was powerfully consolidated by the confederation of cities known as the Decapolis, which apparently included Damascus. In fact, during the later Hellenistic period the whole district east of the Jordan, including Trachonitis, Batanea, and Auranitis, appears to have been Hellenized. Even such important centres as Samaria and Panias were subjected to the same process, having been planted with settlements of Macedonian colonists at an early date. The little Jewish community was thus immersed in Hellenic influence. It made great inroads even in Jerusalem itself, and seemed to be carrying everything before it. A vivid picture is given of the effects of this in the opening chapters of the Books of Maccabees. With the accession of

Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) things came to a crisis. The first act of Antiochus was to deprive the legitimate high priest, Onias III., of his office.

Onias had come to Antioch to answer a charge that had been made against him by a priest of rank, Simon by name. Jason (the brother of Onias) succeeded, by the promise of a large sum, in getting himself appointed to the office. He also assumed the rôle of an enlightened friend of the Greeks, and proposed to found a gymnasium and an *ephebeum* in Jerusalem. "The malady which had long been incubating now reached its acute phase. Just in proportion as Hellenism showed itself friendly did it present elements of danger to Judaism. From the periphery it slowly advanced towards the centre, from the Diaspora to Jerusalem, from mere matters of external fashion to matters of the most profound conviction" (Wellhausen). Led by Jason, the upper classes at Jerusalem (especially the priestly nobility) now displayed a perfect frenzy for the adoption of everything Greek. To such a pitch was this carried

that the high priest actually dared to send offerings to the Tyrian Hercules!* Jason, however, was not for long to enjoy his official honours undisturbed.

Menelaus (a brother of the Simon who had accused Onias III.) took advantage of his presence at Antioch (whither he had been despatched with the annual Jewish tribute) to intrigue against Jason, and succeeded in buying the high-priesthood for a large sum from Antiochus (171 B.C.). Menelaus, however, was only able to obtain possession of his ill-gotten post with the aid of Syrian troops. To pay the tribute he had promised, he found himself compelled to rob the Temple. Disturbances ensued which ultimately brought about the intervention of Antiochus himself (who was returning from Egypt). The angry king severely punished the refractory populace, carried off

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* A significant indication of the Hellenizing fashion, at this time prevalent, is to be seen in the *Grecizing* of Jewish names—*e.g.*, Alcimus=Eliakim, Jason=Jesus (Joshua), Menelaus=Menahem.

the Temple treasures, and restored Menelaus (170 B.C.). But the worst was yet to come. Deeply impressed with the necessity of welding together the motley mass of nationalities which made up his Empire, Antiochus determined to attain this object by imposing upon his subjects a common form of faith. An edict was accordingly issued to that effect. A collision with the Jews was now inevitable, for the mass of the people were still loyal to the faith of their fathers. To enforce the edict Apollonius was sent with an army against Jerusalem. Falling upon the city unawares he disarmed the inhabitants, dismantled the walls, and garrisoned the Acra (the citadel of Jerusalem). He then proceeded with his plan of operations, which was "to abolish Judaism and establish the worship of Olympian Zeus. The 'abomination of desolation' was set up in the Temple; the sacred Scriptures were burnt; the practice of circumcision was forbidden on pain of death, and all the horrors of a religious persecution descended on the land" (168 B.C.).*

* Morrison, *The Jews under Roman Rule.*

The violent measures of Antiochus had the opposite effect to that which he desired. I have already alluded to the existence of a Hellenizing party among the Jews at Jerusalem, which, for a time, seemed to be carrying everything before it. Opposed to this party were the scribes and the "Assideans"—*i.e., chasidim* ("pious ones")— as they were called (1 Macc. ii. 42), who held fast to the Law of Moses. At first the mass of the people appeared to favour the Hellenizers. But the rash attempt of Antiochus to abolish Judaism at one stroke precipitated a violent reaction. The national instinct for self-preservation was roused, and the best elements among the people joined the Assideans in protest and revolt.

I do not propose to linger over the details of the well-known story of the Maccabean revolt, or the varying fortunes of Judas (166-161), Jonathan (161-143), and Simon (142-135), the last of the Hasmonean brothers, with whom the Maccabean house attained a secure position as rulers of the nation. Judas had made himself master of Judæa in 165, and so remained till the summer of 163.

His first act marked one of the most dramatic turns of fortune in history, in the purification and rededication of the polluted Temple of Jehovah in the December of 165 — a date which has been commemorated by the Jews ever since down to the present time by the Feast of Dedication, or "the Encænia," as it is called in St. John's Gospel (John x. 22). The gallant Judas fell in battle in 161. Simon, in a great assembly of the nation, was proclaimed high priest and military and civil governor of the Jews, and this office was solemnly declared to be hereditary ("*for ever* till a trustworthy prophet should arise," 1 Macc. xiv. 41). Under his son and successor, John Hyrcanus (135-105 B.C.), Judaism became an armed doctrine, in the literal sense of the term, for John conquered Samaria and Idumæa, demolished the hated Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim, and imposed Judaism by the sword upon the Idumæans, in this respect anticipating the method of Mohammed.

John Hyrcanus was succeeded by his eldest son Aristobulus, who, however, only reigned one year

(105-104 B.C.); he conquered the Ituræans. His brother, Alexander Jannæus (104-78 B.C.) was a rough soldier, who combined this character with that of high priest (a sort of Pope John XXII.). He was engaged in constant warfare, partly with external foes, but partly with his own countrymen. The civil war was waged especially with the Pharisees. When the latter invited the Syrians to intervene there was a revulsion of popular feeling in favour of the King, who ultimately came out triumphant, and at the end of his reign had enlarged the boundaries of the kingdom. He was succeeded by his widow, Salome Alexandra (78-69 B.C.). His elder son, Hyrcanus II., became high priest. Queen Alexandra favoured the Pharisees. Her younger son, Aristobulus II., became leader of the Sadducees. On the death of the Queen, Aristobulus overthrew his brother Hyrcanus and made himself King (69-63 B.C.). Then followed Roman intervention.

But the fierce reaction of Judaism in the Maccabean epoch against the armed onset of Hellenism did not mean that the conflict was over. Judaism

had asserted its rights as a religion — and with the attainment of religious freedom the best religious elements in the nation were content; they had no desire to go on fighting for national independence. Nevertheless, the national consciousness had been stirred, and the proud insistence of the Jewish people on the distinctive character of their religion had been immensely deepened and consolidated. An uneasy truce followed; but the conflict with Hellenism was renewed on the question of the Emperor-worship; in another form it persisted in the struggle within the early Christian Church of the Judaizing and Hellenizing elements, which has marked even later stages of the movements of Christianity. And again it can be seen in the reaction within the most Hellenized types of Judaism against the prevalent paganism.

Before we pass on to consider the significance of the age-long conflict it will be worth while to study some aspects of it within the most Hellenized type of Judaism—that of Alexandria.

In its most intensely Jewish form Judaism was entrenched in Palestine, and more especially in

Judæa. But in some respects even more significant and important was the Judaism outside Palestine, and in particular that part of the Jewish Dispersion which was included within the confines of the Roman Empire, and was most in evidence along the shores of the Mediterranean. The Jewish Diaspora of the Græco-Roman world was naturally permeated with Hellenic influences. How heavily Greek culture told upon them the Judæo-Alexandrine literature eloquently attests. They used Greek even in their religious services; they read the Bible in Greek, Hebrew being an unknown tongue to the great majority of them; they adopted Greek names, and, to some extent, Greek organization in their communal institutions.

There was, then, a real difference between the Judaism of Palestine and of the Dispersion in the matter of language. The Jews of Palestine spoke a Semitic language—Aramaic—as their mother-tongue and used Hebrew in their religious services. But even in Palestine during the first century of our era Hellenic influence was pervasive and persistent, as is shown by the remarkable fact

that both in Rabbinic Hebrew and in Palestinian Aramaic, Greek loan-words abound. On the other hand, in religious matters there was no great gulf, as is sometimes supposed, between the orthodoxy of Palestine and that of the Diaspora synagogues. Both were divided by party conflicts, and the liberal tendency was rather more marked in the Diaspora than in Palestine. So long, however, as the Temple stood and was regarded as the spiritual centre of Judaism, being constantly visited by masses of pilgrims from different parts of the world, it exercised a moderating and unifying influence, and no sharp and essential division between Palestinian Judaism and that of "Hellenistic circles" made itself seriously felt. The Greek-speaking Jew regarded himself as a genuine Jew —not a Greek—in religion, and was conscious of a sharp and fundamental opposition between the religion he professed and that of the heathen Greek world around him. As Philo puts it the Jews (of the Dispersion) called themselves Palestinians in religion, but Hellenes in language. This exactly expresses the situation. Even where Judaism was

most deeply immersed in Hellenic influence, there was one element which remained as a distinctive feature in the Jew—his religion. Here he felt he had something infinitely precious to cherish and to offer, and in no spirit of arrogance, but fired with a lofty enthusiasm to win the adherence of the heathen world to a higher faith. The Diaspora Jews carried on a great missionary propaganda, which, in spite of prejudice and hatred on the part of the pagan world, met with amazing success. This success provoked violent attacks on the part of a number of heathen writers, and must have been remarkable. "We cannot account," says Th. Reinach, "for the enormous growth of the Jewish population in Egypt, Cyprus, and Cyrene, without assuming a large admixture of Gentile proselytes." St. Paul, it will be remembered, met with proselytes in Pisidian Antioch, in Thyatira, in Thessalonica, and in Athens. Horace, Persius, and Juvenal vouch for the success of the propaganda in Rome.

Thus it will be seen that Judaism, even in its most pronouncedly Hellenized form, was most aggressive in its attempts to propagate its religion.

It will be interesting, and perhaps instructive, to sketch some of the violent reactions produced by the impact of Judaism and Hellenism in that typical centre of Hellenistic Judaism, Alexandria. The occurrence of anti-Semitic outbreaks in the city is, of course, attested by Philo; and within the last few years the matter has been further illuminated by discoveries of papyri, some of which have been edited in a fascinating volume entitled *Jews and Christians in Egypt,* by Mr. H. I. Bell of the British Museum, published in 1924 by the Trustees.

Alexandria was, perhaps, the most typical product of the Hellenistic period. Founded by Alexander himself, and unburdened by the traditions of an older age, the city easily became the natural home and centre of everything Hellenistic and modern. The Jews formed an important element in the city's population, and according to Josephus had been established there from the first. One whole quarter of the city, known as "the Delta," was early assigned to them, but in Philo's time two quarters appear to have been predominantly

Jewish, and Jewish residents were scattered over other parts of the city. The Jews, however, for reasons which will be discussed later, were not popular with their neighbours, on the whole. Whether there were any outbreaks of anti-Semitic violence during the Ptolemaic period is uncertain. The story given in 3 Maccabees of a persecution of Jews in Alexandria by Ptolemy IV. Philopator (222-204 B.C.) is too legendary in form to be trusted implicitly. Perhaps the suspicion and dislike with which they were regarded, and which is attested by the letter of Aristeas (100 B.C.), did not issue in any serious outbreak till a later time. At any rate, there is no doubt that the long slumbering, hostile feeling came to overt expression in Roman times. Mr. Bell suggests that "it was now accentuated by political causes. The Jews had deserted the national dynasty on the arrival of the Romans, and they received their reward in the confirmation of their privileges and in the special favour of the Emperors. But the Alexandrines, who saw their city degraded from a royal capital to a subordinate position under Imperial Rome,

were constantly hostile to the Emperors, and consequently hated their Jewish *protégés* the more bitterly."

The story told by Philo in his two treatises, *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium*, may be reconstructed as follows: It was in the summer of A.D. 38 that King Agrippa I., on his way to take up the government of his new Kingdom of Palestine, arrived at Alexandria. His Jewish fellow-countrymen could not allow such an occasion to pass without appropriate demonstrations. A Jewish king, high in the Emperor's favour, could not be allowed to come and go without some public recognition. Agrippa seems to have travelled with incredible pomp. This was too much for the fun-loving populace of Alexandria, who remembered that not so long since Agrippa had haunted the great banking houses of the city, begging for subsidies. So they perpetrated a malicious satire. Seizing a well-known crazy character, Karabas by name, they dragged him to the theatre, clothed him with royal insignia, and hailed him as the Jewish king.

Agrippa was not personally molested; but the insult to a personal friend of the Emperor was patent, and, on reflection, appeared to be dangerous. In order to put themselves right with the Emperor, and, at the same time, embarrass the unfortunate Jews, the leaders of the mob suggested to the Governor (Flaccus) that statues of the Emperor should be set up in the Jewish synagogues to receive divine honours. Flaccus agreed. The Jews, relying on their privileges which guaranteed them freedom of worship, naturally resisted. This led to violent measures. The Jews were driven from other parts of the city into the "Delta," a large number of private dwellings were seized and sacked; many individuals were murdered, and the survivors were treated with every kind of ignominy and outrage. The Governor (Flaccus), who appears to have been consistently hostile to the Jews on this occasion, was arrested in the autumn of 38 and banished. The Jews, however, were not prepared to let matters rest here. Having obtained permission to lay their case before the Emperor, they sent an embassy to Rome,

probably in the late autumn or winter of the same year. This is the embassy which forms the theme of Philo's treatise, the *Legatio ad Gaium*. Apparently another embassy representing their opponents was also received, and the result appears to have been unfavourable to the Jews. But the veiled hostility went on, and it is probable (from a study of the evidence of the papyri), that Claudius found it necessary to intervene to protect the Jews of Alexandria at a later date. It is clear that on this occasion he confirmed the Jews in all their privileges and restored "that liberty of worship" which had been disturbed under Caligula.

The evidence of the papyri thus suggests that the events narrated by Philo were very far from being a unique occurrence peculiar to the reign of a Caligula. "The bitter hatred of Greeks and Jews in Alexandria," says Professor Dobschutz, "appears as a chronic evil, which, ever breaking forth afresh, produced entirely similar scenes, not alone under Caligula's successor Claudius (41-54), but even under Trajan (98-117) and Commodus (180-92)."*

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* *American Journal of Theology*, VIII., *732 f.*

II

When we ask ourselves the causes of the strange results produced by the impact of Judaism and Hellenism, we can only say that Judaism, as ever, at once attracted and repelled. It might have seemed probable that the Hellenized Judaism of Alexandria would have succeeded in completely absorbing the Jewish element into itself. The Jews adopted the Greek language, and to a large extent Greek customs — and yet they remained a race apart. Judaism, as we have seen, exercised a strange attractive power over many Greeks, and won many proselytes from the pagan world. What was the secret of this attraction?

"It must be admitted," says Th. Reinach, "that Judaism lacked certain of those attractive features which drew the multitude to the cult of Mithras and of the Egyptian deities. Its physical exactions repulsed those wanting in stout courage; its cult, devoid of imagery and sensuous rites, presented only an austere poesy separating its adepts from the world, and cutting them off to some extent from the communion of the cultured. But the prac-

tical and legal character of its doctrine, furnishing a rule of life for every occasion, could not but appeal to a disintegrated society. The purity and simplicity of its theology captivated the high-minded, while the mystery and quaintness of its customs, the welcome Sabbath-rest, the privileges enjoyed at the hand of public authorities, recommended the Jewish faith to those more materialistically inclined."

At the same time the Jews were not popular, more particularly with the middle classes in the Greek cities. Their religious and racial peculiarities, their undisguised contempt for the institutions of paganism, especially the gymnasium and theatre, in a word their attitude of aloofness towards the characteristic features of Greek city life—all this contributed to make them unpopular.

During the Hellenistic Age the civilized world, which meant the Hellenized world, and embraced East and West, was everywhere profoundly influenced by the Greek ideal of culture, though this was not always presented in a pure and unadulterated form. The old institutions of Hellas had

become diffused and, to a large extent, democratized. The Hellenized world invested city life with all sorts of new interests and institutions, both political and social. Especially prominent and important were institutions connected with education, both schools and universities. Literature was eagerly studied, and through the theatre the drama was popularized. Rhetoricians, philosophers, poets, teachers, flourished. One of the best sides of Hellenism is its devotion to the ideal of education. Wherever Greek influence prevailed, there educational institutions flourished. In this respect the modern Greeks are true to type. Or take such an institution as the *gymnasium*. In the papyri a prominent official, who appears in the embassy before the Emperor, is referred to several times as "gymnasiarch." The gymnasiarchs, in fact, regularly appear in these documents as leaders of the anti-Semitic faction. Commenting on this fact, Dr. Dobschutz remarks:* "We shall easily comprehend its significance if we endeavour to recall

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* *American Journal of Theology*, VIII., 750 *f*.

the place in national politics of the ancient gymnastic clubs. The gymnasium, rather than the school of philosophy, was the centre of Greek public life. The influence of athletic training of the body reached a far wider circle and had a greater importance than the scientific training of the mind. In many Greek cities there were athletic societies for older men as well as for the youth, and participation in them was for citizens a matter not only of honour, but of political duty. Now the gymnasium was the side of Greek life for which the Jews had least inclination. In the Books of Maccabees, the climax of the Hellenizing movement is represented as having been reached in the establishment within the Temple of a gymnasium and gymnastic exercises." In the gymnasium the Greek character exhibited the side in which it was most opposed to Judaism. It is only natural that, just as the Jews hated and abhorred it, the Greek youths of the gymnasium, on the other hand, and at their head the gymnasiarch, regarded hatred of the Jews as bound up with their sport.

The baser side of Hellenism was to be seen in

the Province of Syria. Here the salutary checks against licence, which were provided by the severe discipline of the rules of training, were forgotten, and the constant round of games and shows tended to a life of mere gratification of the senses. A historian, writing about a hundred years before Christ, describes this life as follows:*

"The people of these cities are relieved by the fertility of their soil from a laborious struggle for existence. Life is a continuous series of social festivities. Their gymnasiums they use as baths, where they anoint themselves with costly oils and myrrhs. In the *grammateia* (such is the name they give the public eating-halls) they practically live, filling themselves there for the better part of the day with rich foods and wine: much that they cannot eat they carry away home. They feast to the prevailing music of strings. The cities are filled from end to end to end with the noise of harp-playing."

The individualism of the age showed itself es-

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* *Jerusalem under the High Priests,* p. 42 *f.*

pecially in the religious and moral sphere. While over large tracts of the Græco-Roman world religious and moral chaos prevailed, pathetic attempts to promote movements of moral reformation were promoted. It was the age of syncretism. The typical expression of the new spirit and the new outlook was the cult-brotherhood, the Θίασος. The attempt to replace the old state-religion by the worship of the ruler, which was made by the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, and was later imported into the Roman Empire, was largely successful as a political symbol. But it never succeeded in permanently meeting the religious needs of the mass of the people. The pressure of these needs banded men together in larger or smaller groups dedicated to the worship and service of a deity or group of deities. The inscriptions reveal that these brotherhoods were largely made up of foreigners, and are found more particularly in busy seaports like the Piræus. "On the coasts of Asia Minor," says Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy, "in the isles of the Ægean Θίασοι they can be traced in considerable numbers before the Christian era."

Similarly in the Imperial Age associations of μύσται (initiates) can be traced in the same regions, such places as Smyrna and Ephesus being important centres. In these associations the cult of Dionysus was closely associated with that of the Phrygian deities, the Great Mother and Sabazius. Serapis associations were numerous also in the islands of the Ægean well before the Christian era.

An interesting example of syncretism is the Isis-Serapis cult, a compound of Greek and Egyptian religions, the Osiris-worship and elements derived from the Eleusinian mysteries. This mystery-cult spread all over the Greek-speaking world in the second and first centuries B.C. It reached Rome by 80 B.C., and followed the Roman arms all over the West. The tendency of these cults was in the direction of what has been called a "monotheistic pantheism," and emphasized the idea of salvation.

"If we turn to consider those elements which belonged to the classical tradition of Greek civilization, to the tradition cultivated in literary circles,

and in the schools," writes Dr. Edwyn Bevan, "the tradition which the old-fashioned scholar was apt to take as completely representative of the first-century world, Stoicism would be the element of prime importance for the Christian Church. For in Stoicism the mind of antiquity had not only reached in some respects its highest expression, but that expression had become popular in a way unparalleled in the history of any later school. The Stoic missionary, preaching the self-sufficiency of virtue in a threadbare cloak at the street corners, had been one of the typical figures of a Greek town for many generations before St. Paul."*

It is one of the most striking features of the Hellenistic period, and highly significant, that the schools of philosophy felt themselves compelled to come down to the market-place. The doctrines of the schools were expounded in popular form. St. Paul's speech at Athens conforms to the opportunities and circumstances of the time. In its

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* *Hellenism and Christianity.*

earlier forms, however, Stoicism was rather the creed of an intellectual aristocracy.

It has often been pointed out that the most illustrious exponents of the Stoic philosophy were drawn from countries outside Greece proper. The founder was a Phœnician; other leaders came from Babylon, Tyre, Sidon, Carthage, Cilicia, Phrygia, and Rhodes. "Not a single Stoic of any name was a native of Greece proper." Commenting on this fact, Bishop Lightfoot observed: "To Eastern affinities Stoicism was, without doubt, largely indebted for the features which distinguished it from other schools of Greek philosophy. To this fact may be ascribed the intense moral earnestness which was its most honourable characteristic. If the later philosophers generally, as distinguished from the earlier, busied themselves with ethics rather than metaphysics, with the Stoics this was the one absorbing passion. The contrast between the light reckless gaiety of the Hellenic spirit and the stern, unbending, almost fanatical moralism of the followers of Zeno is as complete as could well be imagined. The ever

active conscience, which is the glory, and the proud self-consciousness, which is the reproach, of the Stoic school, are alike alien to the temper of ancient Greece. Stoicism breathes rather the religious atmosphere of the East which fostered, on the one hand, the inspired devotion of a David or an Isaiah, and, on the other, the self-mortification and self-righteousness of an Egyptian therapeute or an Indian fakir."

Zeno had something about him of the Hebrew prophet. He spoke with the voice of authority, and men listened not because they were convinced by mere logic, but because they were swayed by an irresistible moral power which rose up in their hearts and affirmed that this teaching was true. Stoicism came to the rescue of a society where all the old sanctions had broken down under the pitiless and disintegrating criticism of Greek rationalistic philosophy. It supplied something in the nature of real religion to an almost bankrupt world.

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When Christianity first entered the Greek

world Stoicism had passed through a long history. It had, as we have seen, carried its message through the Cynic preachers of righteousness into the hearts of the mass of the people, and it had profoundly stirred and awakened the popular conscience. It also created a body of ethical terms which were afterwards taken over by Christianity. It thus rendered great services to religion, and prepared the way for Christianity. If I may repeat some words I have used elsewhere, "it was governed by a great ideal, was marked by high ethical power, and it produced a few great men of noble character. It impressed the conscience of the Greek and Roman world. But its ethics were not Christian—it was a creed of despair and acquiescence, and it despised all the virtues that depend upon the affirmation 'God is Love.' It had no belief in Progress, and its outlook on the world was dark and forbidding—removed poles asunder from that of the Christian. It totally lacked the dynamic which carried Christianity forward and made it a religion of moving power for mankind. If Christianity largely absorbed its ethical terminology it

invested the terms with an entirely new content and new values."

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It has been assumed above that Christianity and Judaism are to be placed in the same category as representatives of "Hebraism." And this is justified by fundamental facts. Just as Judaism found itself in conflict with Hellenism and had to fight for its life, emerging from the conflict not without many scars and marks of the grim struggle which it had been compelled to wage, so early Christianity was compelled to fight for its life against Gnosticism, which embodied some Greek elements mixed with many other factors besides, and at various times since has been obliged to struggle against a tendency to over-Hellenize its theology. The element common to Judaism and Christianity alike, which, in the last resort, has held its own against all assaults, is the Hebrew conception of God which was worked out in its full implications by the great Prophets of the Old Testament and produced ethical monotheism. It is worth while to inquire in what respects this con-

ception diverges from Hellenic ideas, and whether, in the last resort, any reconciliation is possible between them.

III

The Greek took an intellectual view of the world. His attitude towards reality is ideally that of detachment. He is prepared coolly and critically to survey the phenomena of the universe. "The note of Hellenism," it has been said, "is balance, symmetry, an impartial distribution of sympathy, not only on the moral side of life, but in every sphere of human activity, the moral hardly even predominating. To him more truly than to most could the words of Terence be applied: *humani nihil a me alienum puto*. In his history, his poetry, and his philosophy he preserves an even balance of sympathy. . . . This is, perhaps, only another way of saying that he contemplates the world from a predominantly æsthetic, rather than from an ethical or religious standpoint." This is in a general sense true, and represents correctly the characteristic tendencies of the Greek mind and attitude to life. It is true that there are exceptions for which al-

lowance may be made — for instance, the great Greek tragedies are certainly, in a sense, religious or semi-religious in tone, and faithfully portray the clash of wills and passions—but even here one cannot escape the impression that the treatment of these high themes is predominantly æsthetic and artistic. The Greek, unlike the Hebrew, does not see everything in the light of God.

Herein is revealed a fundamental difference between the Greek and the Hebrew temperaments. The Greek is an artist to his finger-tips; the Hebrew, though he often succeeds in producing effects in literature of the highest artistic power, does so unconsciously; he is indifferent really to form. "Aristotle in the *Poetics* lays down the law that, in a tragedy, nothing is more important than the arrangement of the incident; it is . . . more important even than the correct delineation of character. Reverse this, and you have approximately the Hebrew conception of the relation of character to incident."* The Hebrew writers often

* McFadeyn, *Hellenism and Hebraism,* A.J.T., VIII., 31.

produce effects of the highest artistic power, but that is because they have a vivid sense of personality, a dramatic sense which enables them, at their best, to picture a scene from the life which is unforgettable. But they are primarily interested in character on its ethical side, and in personality as reflecting character.

Further, the Hebrew is defective on the analytical side, where the Greek is so strong. The Hebrew genius does not find itself at home in discussion, examination, comparison, criticism. This difference is reflected in the structure and characteristic forms of the respective languages. The Greek loves to suggest the finer shades of meaning by the use of different tenses and moods; he emphasises the logical connection between sentences and sections by the use in rich variety of logical particles, and, above all, he strives, by the skilful and subtle use of subordination, to make his sentences artistic and symmetrical in form. The elaborate variety of linguistic equipment is totally absent from the Hebrew language. It has only two tenses, and practically no particles of connexion

except "and." When the expression "therefore," is employed, it marks not the conclusion of an argument, but the affirmation of a moral judgment. Could anything more unlike a Greek oration in form be imagined than the Sermon on the Mount?

It has been said that these defects on the analytic side disqualified the Hebrew from becoming a philosopher. This, I suppose, is true, though I have always believed that a preliminary study of Hebrew would be an ideal discipline for one who was destined to become a professed philosopher.

But the fundamental cleavage between Greek and Hebrew is to be found in the conception of God. One must, of course, fully acknowledge that the crude levity of the Greek myths about the gods was later refined away by the allegorical method for a more worthy and serious conception. Under the influence of philosophy a sort of monotheism was evolved, and the multitude of deities was resolved into the essence of all Being τὸ ὄν. But what does this amount to? As Paul Wendland remarks with profound truth in the essay to which

I have already referred: "It is not every form of monotheism which, apart from its contents, can necessarily claim to be preferable to polytheism. The monotheistic movement of Hellenism, in fact, was the result of a process of disintegration and emptying of religions. Its historical significance lies in the fact that it created the forms into which Christianity found entrance and was able to pour a new religious content." The ethical monotheism which is common both to Judaism and Christianity is of a very different kind. It is the doctrine of one God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, as revealed to Moses and the Prophets; it was the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew Prophets, with its intense realization of the personal character of Israel's God, with its burning sense of Jehovah's righteousness, holiness, and ethical requirement, and its passionate hatred of idolatry in all its forms and associations—it was this kind of monotheism, and not the speculative and nebulous monotheistic theories of Greek philosophers, that carried Judaism and Christianity forward and invested them with such attractive power. This

distinctively Jewish conception of God comes out clearly in the Jewish-Alexandrine apologetic literature. Nothing could well be more Greek in form. If we take, for instance, the Jewish parts of the Sibylline oracles, behind the elaborately constructed Greek verses, what do we find? The poems are full of exhortations to the heathen world to accept belief in the one God, whose chosen people is the Jews, and to lead moral lives in accordance with the ethical code of the Divine Law. In spite of its Greek form, nothing could be more intensely Jewish. The fervent spirit of the Jewish missionary is on fire with the conviction that in preaching ethical monotheism he has something to offer the Gentile world which is infinitely precious and which it cannot find elsewhere.

Further, if we turn from Greek philosophic ideas of God to more popular conceptions, we are struck by the fact that no clear line of demarcation exists in Greek ideas of divinity between gods and men. Mortals could be subjected to apotheosis. With this notion Judaism — and Christianity — could make no terms at all. To the Jew and Chris-

tian alike God was one unique and holy Being, whose majesty could not be shared. The State-worship of the Emperor was the blasphemy of blasphemies.

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These divergent conceptions of God produce results which show themselves in various ways—not least of all in the delineation of character and personality. When, for instance, the Greek philosopher forgets himself, and, instead of keeping rigidly to his discussion of principle, draws the picture of his ideal man, we cannot help feeling how much better adapted the Hebrew world was than the Greek to teach humanity the harder lessons and the nobler ideals of religion. The high-minded or great-souled man of Aristotle, who may fairly be taken as the Greek ideal, is one "who claims much and deserves much"; he hates gossip, despises flattery, is measured in speech, and takes a calm and unruffled view of life. But does not this rather supercilious figure "look down upon everything"? He has no use for humility, either Hebrew or Christian. He is not overshadowed by the presence of God.

Christianity, it is true, has been largely Hellenized, and it is possible to argue ingeniously that, in spite of its Jewish heritage, it shares many elements with Hellenism. But there has been a fundamental transvaluation of values produced by the Jewish and Christian conception of God, and, unless this is fully grasped, detailed comparisons will prove largely misleading.

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The question remains: Is any reconciliation between Greek and Hebrew thought possible? I can only attempt a rough and summary answer. History is strewn with the débris of the conflicts between Hebraism and Hellenism. These are, I think, in every case due to the excessive cultivation or claims of the one element at the expense of the other. Hebraism may degenerate into a blind and narrow fanaticism. Hebrew fire has sometimes burned with too intense a glow. On the other hand, Hellenism may evaporate into a thin and paralyzing intellectualism, a barren rationalism which withers away all the finer impulses of living. Both are essential if the whole man is to be kept healthy.

Surely it should not be impossible to reconcile "sweet reasonableness" with deep conviction of the binding obligation of the moral law. One essential way is to see that the study of Hebrew literature should have its proper place in our educational system. On this point I will venture to quote some wise words of the late Dr. Richard G. Moulton, who has done so much to promote the study of the Bible—the English Bible—as noble literature. He says: "From the educational, as distinguished from the religious point of view, the Old Testament is the most important part of the Bible. Our whole modern civilization and culture rests upon the coalescence, in the old Roman world, of Greek and Hebrew thought. We should look for a reflection of this in our higher education. Unfortunately, our educational systems crystallized into their present form when the Hellenic factor was being unduly emphasized. They do full justice to Greek Classics. But the corresponding Hebrew Classics they leave to religious study — that is, to specialization; as a result, these Biblical Classics have fallen out of general culture, to the

scandal of our higher education. Yet there is not a single point that can be urged as to the educational importance of the Greek Classics which does not tell equally in favour of the Biblical Classics.

". . . It may well happen that a reader, who has been saturating himself with the imaginative flights of Isaiah, of Habakkuk or Joel, may turn to his Pindar and be conscious of a drop, rather than a rise, in poetry."

PART II

Early Christianity and the Hellenic World

I

It is far from my desire to underestimate the importance of the fact that historical Christianity, though fundamentally Jewish in origin, was born into a world which had been almost completely Hellenized. The significance of this fact cannot be ignored. Greek culture, the Greek language, Greek institutions, were all-pervasive. Judaism itself could not escape this atmosphere. In the first century of our era the number of Jews outside Palestine who used the commonly spoken dialect of Greek (κοινή) as their vernacular was probably not less than the Jewish population of Palestine itself, including the province of Galilee. It may well have been substantially more. And even in Palestine there was a considerable leaven of Greek influence down to A.D. 70, and even later, among the Jewish population. In Galilee, indeed, the population was, to some extent, bilingual. Sometimes the two lan-

guages, the vernacular Aramaic and the κοινή, existed side by side, as, for instance, in Bethsaida, which appears to have possessed a Greek quarter, where the upper classes mostly resided, and an Aramaic-speaking quarter which was inhabited mostly by the humbler folk. It is interesting to note that Galileans often bore two names, one Greek and another Aramaic, a striking example being the Apostle Peter, whose Greek name (Πέτρος) is simply a translation of the Aramaic word which we know as Cephas—*i.e.*, "rock." In Judæa, where the Jewish population was less mixed, and Jewish life and feeling were most intense, the Greek language was usually known to the educated classes; and, in fact, many Greek words had penetrated into the vernacular Aramaic, and even into the Rabbinical Hebrew which was used by the doctors of the Law for scholastic purposes.

But though Judaism, even in its central strongholds, had been profoundly influenced by its Greek environment, and in the first and second centuries of our era was immersed in a world of culture and

ideas which were Hellenic — though it was subjected to the enormous and incessant pressure of these cultural forces—it never completely surrendered to them. Its central fire still glowed and burnt defiantly in spite of the Hellenic flood. Once, indeed, in its chequered history it had seemed to be on the point of succumbing, when that ardent and over-zealous apostle of Greek culture, Antiochus Epiphanes, in his impatience to be done with the barbarous obstinacy of an obscure tribal cult, as he regarded it, which was holding up his grandiose scheme for the complete cultural unification of his heterogeneous provinces, resorted to persecution and precipitated the Maccabean revolt. As the result, Judaism became more solid and self-conscious, and incidentally Antiochus secured for himself a place in history which he would have been the last to desire. He figures in Daniel as the "little horn," and became the prototype of Antichrist and the Beast of the later Apocalypses. At the heart of Judaism there was something which resisted all the alluring and disintegrating effects of Greek culture. This something was its intense

realization of the personality of God as the God of righteousness. To the Jew, God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who was also the Creator of the world and the Ruler of the universe—was primarily a Person who demanded ethical righteousness. This conception of God is fundamental, and was never completely obscured even by the *minutiæ* of a legalistic religion. By the first century of our era Judaism, especially the Judaism of the Jewish communities who lived in various parts of the Græco-Roman Empire outside Palestine, had, in a sense, come to terms with Hellenism. But this by no means meant that the Jews of the Dispersion had become completely Hellenized. They used the Greek language, and had ceased to understand Hebrew (this, at least, is true of the mass of them). They read their sacred scriptures in Greek (the LXX), and even used the Greek language in their synagogue services. But they were still acutely conscious of being Jews and not Greeks in religion. As Philo puts it, the Jews (of the Dispersion) called themselves Palestinians in religion, but Hellenes in language.*

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* Cf. *Jewish Encycl.*, VI., 337

The Jew of the Dispersion was fired with a burning enthusiasm to convert the heathen world to his own monotheistic faith. Philo proclaims that the Jewish people is the priestly nation, "one that has received the priesthood for the whole human race"†; and this conviction animated the Jewish Diaspora as a whole. It found overt expression in an intense missionary propaganda which, in spite of fierce opposition in some quarters, was attended with immense success. It was largely among the proselytes who had been won over from the heathen world by the Jewish missionaries that St. Paul found his first converts to Christianity. The typical Jew of the Diaspora had been subjected to Greek influence on a large scale; but we must be on our guard against exaggerating the effects of this influence. At the heart of the Jew's religion was the unshakable belief in the One God and His ethical requirement; the ethical standpoint remained strictly Jewish, and made all the difference. This will account for the remarkable fact that the Jewish

† *De Abrah,* II., 15.

population in the Dispersion, though it assimilated so much of its environment, yet remained unmistakably distinct. The Jews lived mostly in the cities, and in a separate quarter; they enjoyed special privileges and exemptions under the law, and were allowed to organize themselves as autonomous communities.

II

At the time when Christianity came out into the world, the world that confronted it was a Hellenized world. And this was true not only of Europe, but of Asia over a very wide area. Everywhere both in the East and the West, in the countries included within the Roman Empire, the Greek language was spoken and read by the educated classes. Over a large area, of course, it was the language of everyday life. Everywhere, too, Greek institutions like the gymnasium and the theatre were in evidence. Dr. Edwyn Bevan brings the matter home when he remarks: "We are often told in popular books that 'the East never changes,' that Orientals have an invincible repugnance to Western ideas, and so forth. . . . Well, you would

make a great mistake if you imagined, say, the Damascus of St. Paul's time like the Damascus of to-day. In St. Paul's time we should have found ourselves in a Greek city. Arabs from the desert in native dress would no doubt have appeared in the streets, and Jews with their fringes and phylacteries, but we should have seen the citizens of the upper class to all appearance Greek, we should continually have heard Greek talked around us, and the environment would be largely made up of Greek temples, and halls and colonnades."*

Greek civilization and Greek institutions had indeed transformed the world. Hellenism had filled life with new interests. There was something very alluring about Greek culture — it captivated and enthralled. Among other achievements it created a new tradition of education. When Christianity emerged into the wider world it came face to face with an *educated* world. Everywhere in the towns grammar schools were to be found, while at certain centres were great seats of learning,

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* *Jerusalem under the High Priests.*

rather like the medieval universities to which students of all classes resorted. Tarsus in St. Paul's time was a centre of this sort. Students then, as now, attended lectures, and sometimes showed by their manner that they were thinking of other things.

"Many persons," says Philo, "who come to a lecture do not bring their minds inside with them, but [let their minds] go wandering about outside, thinking ten thousand things about ten thousand different subjects—family affairs, other people's affairs . . . and the professor talks to an audience, as it were, not of men, but of statues."*

Teachers and professors occupied positions of social distinction and were treated with special consideration by State and municipal authorities both in the matter of endowment and exemption from taxation.

The Hellenic world — or perhaps it would be more accurate to describe it as the "Hellenized

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* *Quis rerum div. heres,* 31, cited by Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures.*

world"—was thus permeated with cultural forces which were all-powerful and all-absorbing. On its nobler side this Greek culture quickened and enriched human life generally. But it sometimes assumed base and degraded forms. Dr. Edwyn Bevan has noted how these effects were specially noticeable in the Province of Syria in the centuries both immediately before and after the Christian Era.*

When we ask ourselves what was the moral state of the Græco-Roman world in the first two centuries of our era, it is perhaps not quite so easy to generalize as is sometimes assumed. Dr. Hatch, indeed, attempts to discount the evidence that has come down to us. He says:

"It has been common to construct pictures of the state of morals in the first centuries of the Christian era from the statements of satirists who, like all satirists, had a large element of caricature, and from the denunciations of the Christian apologists, which, like all denunciations, have a large

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* Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 41 *f.*

element of exaggeration. The pictures so constructed are mosaics of singular vices, and they have led to the not unnatural impression that these centuries constituted an era of exceptional wickedness."†

He goes on to remark:

"It is no doubt difficult to gauge the average morality of any age. It is questionable whether the average morality of civilized ages has largely varied; it is possible that if the satirists of our own time were equally outspoken the vices of ancient Rome might be found to have a parallel in modern London; and it is probable, not on merely a priori grounds, but from the nature of the evidence which remains, that there was in ancient Rome, as there is in modern London, a preponderating mass of those who loved their children and their homes, who were good neighbours and faithful friends, who conscientiously discharged their civil duties, and were in all the current senses of the word 'moral' men."*

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† *Hibbert Lectures.*

* *Op. cit.*

This statement puts the case in as persuasive a manner as is possible. Yet it seems to me not to allow for patent facts. It does not allow sufficiently for the fact that the age was one of disintegration —the old moral and religious sanctions had broken down; the best spirits of the time were acutely conscious of this, and this fact will explain the movements towards moral reformation that had grown up. The world was desperately in need of a religion that would be adequate to the new needs; there was a conflict of religions, and in the end Christianity emerged victorious as the world-religion; but the conflict had not become decisive till well on towards the end of the second century of our era; and in the interval there was, to a large extent, religious and moral chaos.

How can we explain the moral energy of the Jewish (and later the Christian) missionary propaganda unless there was present the conviction on both sides that paganism lacked the moral fibre that only Judaism or Christianity could give?

In this connection it is instructive to study the lines along which the Jewish indictment of pagan-

ism moves. To a large extent the early Christian polemic directed against pagan life and religion is parallel. The real mind of the Jewish teachers about these matters is revealed in the early Rabbinical literature which grew up in Palestine in the first and second centuries A.D. The attitude of these teachers was, it is true, less "liberal" towards the Græco-Roman world than that of the earlier Diaspora Judaism, and became exacerbated when the disastrous war broke out under Hadrian (132-135 A.D.), with the tragic results that followed. We must make full allowance for the bitter feeling that grew up and estranged the Jewish from the outside world from this time. But after making full allowance for this the indictment is sufficiently formidable, and is remarkably confirmed by the early Christian apologists. In particular the idolatry of the heathen world is denounced. Not only is all direct recognition of idol-worship forbidden, but participation in anything that goes to the furtherance of such worship, even indirectly, is sternly reprehended. At the time of the Hadrianic persecution it was enacted by the Rabbis in Lydda

that an Israelite should rather suffer martyrdom than be guilty of idolatry, fornication, or murder. The luxury that was indulged in by the heathen is equally abhorrent to the Jewish and Christian teachers — *e.g.,* Tertullian. The money laid out upon luxuries would be better spent in charity. Sharp opposition was made to any participation in the spectacles at the theatre, circus, and games, because of their deep implication in polytheism. This was the strict requirement both of the Jewish and Christian leaders, and it may seem, perhaps, to savour rather of an extreme form of Puritanism. But it must be remembered that both Judaism and early Christianity were face to face with a system which, in the mass, and over large sections of the population, exercised a degrading and demoralizing influence. Anything short of this sharp protest would have been unavailing. And the protest was justified by the result. As Harnack remarks:* "When Constantine granted privileges to the Church, public opinion had developed to such

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* *The Expansion of Christianity.*

an extent that the State immediately adopted measures for curtailing and restricting the public spectacles." Both Jewish and Christian teachers emphasize the fact that such things as the gladiatorial shows were not only implicated in idolatry, but were in themselves brutalizing as spectacles. It may be added that such spectacles, in spite of prohibition, proved irresistibly attractive to many both of Jews and Christians.

The desperate need in which the age felt itself to be for moral amendment and reformation is reflected in certain developments of philosophy and religious movements within the pagan world itself. Dr. Hatch remarks justly that "the age in which Christianity grew was in reality an age of moral reformation." This manifested itself especially in Stoicism and the growth of the religious guilds associated with certain "mystery-cults." We have already had occasion to refer to Stoicism and to the preaching of the Cynic preachers of righteousness.

Through these Cynic preachers of righteouness Stoicism had made a profound impression upon

the public conscience. Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is the fact that it had created a new set of ethical terms. Bishop Lightfoot, commenting on this fact, says:

"It is difficult to estimate, and perhaps not very easy to overrate the extent to which Stoic philosophy had leavened the moral vocabulary of the civilized world at the time of the Christian era. To take a single instance: the most important of moral terms, the crowning triumph of ethical nomenclature, συνείδησις, *conscientia* (conscience), the internal, absolute, supreme judge of individual action, if not struck in the mint of the Stoics, at all events became current coin through their influence. To a great extent, therefore, the general diffusion of Stoic language would lead to its adoption by the first teachers of Christianity."*

Stoicism was thus a real preparation for Christianity. If we turn to the "mystery-cults," we can see in these religious brotherhoods another indica-

*"St. Paul and Seneca" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians,* p. 303).

tion of the pathetic yearning of the ancient world for regeneration and salvation. The vogue of these mystery-cults in the Imperial Age is well known. One of the most influential, and one, moreover, that illustrates the syncretistic character of these later religious movements, is the cult of Isis, as described by Plutarch in his famous treatise. The Isis-Serapis worship was widely practised in the Hellenistic world. It can be traced at Athens, Pompeii, and Rome, and it spread wherever Roman influence penetrated. The cult evidently made a wide appeal, with its splendid ceremonial and "contemplative devotion," ordered with all the precision characteristic of Egyptian liturgic tradition. It also embodied the elaborate precision of the ancient Egyptian eschatology. Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy, speaking of its wide diffusion and influence says:

"The Isis Mystery-Religion exercised a peculiar attraction just because of its syncretism. Isis could be identified with innumerable deities. As queen of heaven, as Selene, as goddess of the cultivated earth, as Demeter, as giver of crops, as mistress

of the underworld and also of the sea, as goddess of women and beauty and love, as queen of the gods assimilated to Hera and Juno, as goddess of salvation, and also of magical arts, she could claim the adoration of a motley throng of worshippers."*

In Apuleius there is preserved a full account of the initiation of Lucius at Cenchreæ into these mysteries. The candidate, we are told, remained within the precincts of the Temple until summoned by the goddess. Otherwise he might incur the guilt of sacrilege and die. "For," says the high priest, "the portals of the nether world and the guardianship of salvation are placed in the hand of the goddess, and the initiation itself is solemnized as the symbol of a voluntary death, and a salvation given in answer to prayer, for the goddess is wont to choose such as, having fulfilled a course of life, stand at the very threshold of the departing light, to whom nevertheless the great mysteries of religion can be safely entrusted; and after they have been by her providence, in a sense born again, she

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* *St. Paul and the Mystery Religions.*

places them again on the course of a new life in salvation."† Lucius awaited the will of the goddess, giving himself up to prayer and fasting. When at length the wished-for day arrived, he was escorted by a band of Isis-worshippers and bathed by the high priest in the sacred laver. Thereafter, in presence of the goddess, he received mystic communications. Ten days of ascetic preparation follow, and then he is led into the innermost sanctuary. A mystic delineation is given of his culminating experience. "I penetrated to the boundaries of death," he says, "I trod the threshold of Proserpine, and after being borne through all the elements I returned to earth: at midnight I beheld the sun radiating white light. I came into the presence of the gods below and the gods above, and did them reverence close at hand." Fortuneately we have this sympathetic picture of some of the aspects of a typical Hellenistic Mystery-Religion: the solemn external preparation in the prescribed abstinences, the solemn baptism, the com-

† *Cf.* Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 100 *f.*

munication of the mystic formulæ, culminating in the overpowering scenes which came at the last; there is also the inward experience, a genuinely religious one, in the heart-preparation, the idea of cleansing the conception of regeneration, and the final mystical rapture which unites the soul of the initiate with the deity.

These and the religious brotherhoods which made purity of life a condition of membership are genuine manifestations of the religious spirit, and may be regarded as a real preparation for Christianity. But it is very doubtful whether these cults entered so closely and intimately into the organic life of Pauline Christianity as is sometimes suggested. That St. Paul was ever really influenced in his thought by the mystery-religions is very unlikely. His thought and that of the mysteries move in two different worlds. As Professor Kennedy says:

"There is no real analogy between the New Testament idea of a fellowship in the sufferings of Christ and that ritual sympathy with the goddesses who mourned the loss of Osiris and Attis, or with

the woes of those deified beings themselves. In the former self-sacrificing devotion which shrinks from no hardship is the core of the experience. The latter is the result of sensuous impressions more or less artificially produced."* St. Paul's mysticism is thoroughly ethical in character. The cross is central. The mystic death to sin of which the Apostle speaks is wholly different in conception from the mystical identification of the initiate in the mystery-cult with the death of the divine personage whose restoration to life was celebrated and depicted in the mystery-ceremonial. To quote Dr. Kennedy again:

"The ceremonial dedication to a deity whose ritual, based on the revival of life in the world of nature, suggested the soul-kindling prospect of a life beyond the grave could very naturally be described as a dying to the ignorant past and the entrance on a new life of hope. But it requires an unusually daring imagination to fill these terms in the mystery-cults with the profound ethical content which they held for St. Paul."†

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* *Op. cit.* † *Op. cit.*

St. Paul undoubtedly uses terms which are characteristic of the terminology of the mystery-religions, just as he uses occasionally short technical terms. But in both cases the language is charged with a new meaning and a new content. The truth is that behind St. Paul's language there is a fundamentally different conception of God. The Jewish conception of God could not make terms with the Greek idea at all. To the Jew God was one unique and holy Being, supreme and transcendent, the Creator and Ruler of the world, whose majesty could not be shared. To the Jew the very idea of the deification of a man was utterly abhorrent. Not so to the Greek. Apparently in the earlier period of Greek religion heroic qualities or the possession of unusual powers might lead to apotheosis. The mortal, as in the mystery-cult, might achieve divinity. The extent to which this was carried in the Hellenistic world from the time of Alexander the Great and onwards, when divine honours were paid to living rulers, and legends grow up about their supernatural origin is well known. First the Seleucidæ and then the Ptolemies adopted the cult,

and finally it was transferred to the Roman world and culminated in the State-worship of the Emperors. It may be possible to regard all this as the perversion of a true instinct in humanity, which leads men to regard supreme powers and endowments as godlike, and therefore to be invested with the halo of divinity. But to carry the process to the lengths reached in the Hellenistic period inevitably meant the frittering away of all worthy concepts of deity. To the Jew the State-worship of the Emperor was the blasphemy of blasphemies.

III

When Christianity came face to face with this Hellenic world, it confronted it with a lofty conception of God which had its roots in the ethical monotheism of the Hebrew Prophets. It was the God revealed in Jesus Christ whom it preached, a lofty and exclusive conception that would tolerate nothing in the nature of apotheosis in the Greek manner. Whatever use Christianity made of Greek philosophical terms like *Logos* (Word) or σωτηρία (salvation), it never compromised its

central conception of God, which, indeed, stamped its use of these terms with a new content and new meaning. And this is true not only of Pauline Christianity, but also, fundamentally, of the later type of Christian thought and theology, when the Church had really become deeply influenced by Hellenism in various ways. Though threatened in the third century with syncretistic tendencies, the Church kept its recognized theology free from idolatrous taint. The heathen philosopher Porphyry is illuminating on this matter—his words show how the pagan conception of deity still lived on in strength and vigour. He wrote:

"If therefore you declare that beside God there stand angels who are not subject to suffering and death, and are incorruptible in nature—*just the beings we call gods,* inasmuch as they stand near the godhead—then what is all the dispute about, with regard to names? Or, are we to consider it merely a difference of terminology? So if anyone likes to call them either gods or angels—for names are, on the whole, of no great moment, one and the same goddess, for example, being called Athene

and Minerva, and by still other names among the Egyptians and Syrians—then it makes no great difference, as their divine nature is actually attested even by yourselves in Matthew xxii. 29-31."*

And yet what to Porphyry seems to be a mere question of names was to the Christian and Jewish conscience fundamental. When the people of Lystra insisted upon offering divine honours to Barnabas and Paul, calling Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury, the distress of the Apostles was intense, and Paul tried to make them understand that they were the bearers to them of a message from the living God (Acts xiv. 12 *ff*). Similarly, the seer in the *Apocalypse*, when he is represented as prostrating himself before the angel, is bidden to desist and "worship God" (Rev. xxii. 9). This lofty conception of deity with its implications is central both in Jewish and Christian theology. It dominates and forms the distinctive element in both.

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* *Cf.* Harnack, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

PART III

The Conflict of Religions in the Early Centuries of the Christian Era

We have already considered to some extent the reactions of Judaism and Christianity against the prevalent Paganism. When we ask ourselves how we are to account for the large measure of success that attended the early Jewish and later Christian missionary propaganda, we can answer unhesitatingly that the causes were fundamentally moral. As Paul Krüger has pointed out in *Hellenismus und Judentum im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (1908), the epoch of late Hellenism is a time of general disintegration. "Institutions in political, social, and religious life, which had the prestige of centuries behind them, fell to pieces and were obliged to assume new forms."

At such a time the break-up of the old national religions was inevitable. One of the results of this was the popularizing of new (especially Oriental) cults in the Western world—Orontes flowed into Tiber; another was the desperate attempt to estab-

lish a new religious basis in the worship of the Emperor. I propose to sketch some important aspects of the part played in this struggle by the Oriental cults.

In a well-known passage in the *City of God,* St. Augustine denounces with flaming indignation the scenes he had witnessed in his youth in connection with the worship of the Mother of the Gods (*Magna Mater*), which for centuries possessed a firm hold on the Roman world. He describes what he saw in Carthage as follows:

"We ourselves (once in our youth) went to view these spectacles, their sacrilegious mockeries; there we saw the enthusiastics, persons rapt with fury; there we heard the pipers, and took great delight in the filthy sports that they acted before their gods and goddesses: even before Berecynthia (surnamed the celestial virgin, and mother of all the gods), even before her litter upon the feast-day of her very purification, their beastly stage-players acted such ribaldry as was a shame (not only for the mother of the gods, but for the mother of any senator or any honest man, nay

even for the mothers of the players themselves) to give ear to. Natural shame hath bound us with some respect unto our parents, which vice itself cannot abolish. But that beastliness of obscene speeches and actions which the players acted in public before the mother of all the gods, and in sight and hearing of a huge multitude of both sexes, they would be ashamed to act at home in private before their mothers, were it but for repetition's sake. And as for that company that were their spectators, though they might easily be drawn thither by curiosity, yet beholding chastity so foully injured, methinks they should have been driven from thence by the mere shame that immodesty can offend honesty withal. What can sacrileges be if those were sacrifices? Or what can be pollution if this were a purification? And these were called *fercula* (litters, dishes), as if they made a feast where all the unclean devils of hell might fill their bellies. For who knows not what kind of spirits these are that take pleasure in these obscenities? Unless, indeed, he know not that there be any such unclean spirits that thus delude

men under the name of gods; or else, unless he be such an one as wisheth the pleasure, and feareth the displeasure of those accursed powers more than he doth the love and wrath of the true and everliving God."*

Sir Samuel Dill devotes a chapter in his great book *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius* to "Magna Mater," and shows how persistent and aggressive this Eastern cult became. By the time when Augustine wrote, her cult had been enthroned for more than 600 years on the Palatine. In the year 204 B.C. she had been summoned to Italy by an embassy from her original home at Pessinus in Galatia, and had been welcomed at Ostia. But her cult remained a foreign one. No Roman was permitted to accept the Phrygian priesthood for a century after her coming, but towards the end of the Republic her worship had won great success, and her priests and symbols meet us in the pages of Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, and Propertius. Augustus restored her temple.

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* *De Civi. Dei.*, II., 4.

Another stage in her triumphal march was reached with the accession of the Flavian dynasty. Vespasian restored her temple at Herculaneum, and the goddess appears on the coins of Antoninus Pius. A *taurobolium*—a rite intimately associated with her worship—was offered at Lyons for that Emperor in A.D. 165, and we are told by Tertullian that a high priest of Cybele — *i.e.*, the Great Mother—vainly offered his blood for the safety of Marcus Aurelius seven days after the Emperor had died in his quarters on the Danube. In the third century her worship had attained immense popularity—that was the period when the power of the Oriental religions was at its height. At the end of the fourth century, the Great Mother and Mithra were leading the pagan resistance in its last great struggle against triumphant Christianity.

The worship of Cybele was at first a patrician cult, yet it became also popular with the masses of the people. The legend embodied elements of human interest which made a wide appeal. "The love of the Great Mother for a fair youth, his unfaithfulness, and penitential self-mutilation under

the pine-tree; the passionate mourning for lost love, and then the restoration of the self-made victim, attended by a choir of priests for ever, who had made the same cruel sacrifice — all this (says Dr. Dill), so alien to old Roman religious sentiment, triumphed over it in the end by novelty and tragic interest. The legend was developed into a drama which, at the vernal festival of the goddess, was produced with striking, if not artistic, effect. On the first day the Dendrophori bore the sacred tree, wreathed with violets, to the temple. There was then a pause for a day, and, on the third, the priests, with frantic gestures and dishevelled hair, abandoned themselves to the wildest mourning, lacerating their arms and shoulders with wounds, from which the blood flowed in torrents. Severe fasting accompanied these self-inflicted tortures. Then came a complete change of sensation. On the day called Hilaria, the votaries gave themselves up to ecstasies of joy, to celebrate the restoration of Attis. On the last day of the festival a solemn procession took its way to the brook Almon, to bathe the goddess in its waters.

The sacred stone, brought originally from her home in Asia, and the most sacrel symbol of the worship, wrapped in robes, was borne upon a car with chants and music, and other accompaniments of a gross, unabashed naturalism."

And here a word must be interpolated on the question of the *taurobolium,* a sacrificial rite which was performed in connection with the cult of the Great Mother. Whether this connection was original is doubtful. However this may be, its diffusion was effected by the Great Mother cult. It formed one of its most celebrated rites in the last two centuries of paganism. It has been described by Prudentius, a Christian poet of the fourth century: "The high priest of the Great Mother, a golden crown on his head, his temples richly bound with fillets, his toga worn *cinctu Gabino,* descends into a deep foss which is completely covered by a platform of planks pierced by a great number of fine holes. On to this platform is led a huge bull, bedecked with garlands of flowers, his front gleaming with gold. His breast is pierced by the consecrated spear, and the torrent of hot, steaming

blood floods the covering of the trench, and rains through the thousand chinks and perforations on the expectant priest below, who throws back his head the better to present checks, lips, ears, nostrils, and even tongue and palate to the purifying baptism. When life has fled and left cold the body of the slain bullock, and the flamens have removed it, the priest emerges, and with hair, beard, and vestments dripping with blood, presents himself to the expectant throng of worshippers, who salute and do obeisance to him as to one who has been purified."*

The object of this sacrifice was differently motived. In the earlier period (second and third centuries) it was a public sacrifice usually for the Emperor or community. A frequent date was March 24, the *dies sanguinis* (day of blood) of the annual festival of *Mater Magna* and Attis. In the later period (third and fourth centuries) it was frequently celebrated for the purification and regeneration of an individual, who, having received

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* *E.R.E* (*Encyc. Rel. and Ethics*), XII., 214.

it, was spoken of as *renatus in æternum* (reborn into eternity). It was apparently performed by laymen as well as priests, and by persons of both sexes. In Rome it was usually performed at a shrine near the site of St. Peter's church. The rite itself was probably a survival of ancient savage practice which was later re-interpreted to lend it a spiritual significance. The last known celebration of it occurred at Rome in A.D. 394.

The central idea of the *taurobolium,* as it emerges in the later period, is clearly that of regeneration, and it may have been attached to the cult of the Great Mother, as Cumont supposes, through contact with Mithraism, having belonged originally to the worship of the Persian goddess Anahita, who had been closely associated with the Mithra worship in the old Persian religion. It is certain that Mithraism, which was essentially a man's religion, was closely associated with the cult of the Great Mother, which it perhaps helped to spiritualize, in the late pagan period. The two religions, which served to complement each other, could thus work together in alliance. The worship

of the Great Mother was elaborately organized during the Imperial period. It had its priesthood, which sometimes lasted for life or a fixed term of years. Women were also admitted to its priesthood. The Dendrophori, who bore the sacred tree in the festive processions, were organized into a sacred college, and there were other similar organizations embracing the keepers of the mystic symbols. Chanters, drummers, and cymbal-players were in requisition at the great ceremonial occasions such as the *taurobolium,* and were graded according to rank. There were also vergers and apparitors who had charge of the chapels of the goddess, and finally there were the simple worshippers who formed a powerful guild with its officers. "This cult," says Dr. Dill, "like so many others, existed not only for ceremonial rite, but for fellowship and social exhilaration, and, through its many gradations of religious privilege, it must have drawn vast numbers into the sacred service in the times of the Empire. That this worship was, however, attended by many accompaniments of a grossly immoral kind is certain, not only on the

evidence of hostile Christian witnesses, but on the testimony of pagan writers. Crowds of disreputable persons used the name of Cybele to exploit the ignorant devotion or the religious excitability of the masses. But it had a better and nobler side, as we can see, and was capable, from time to time, of renewal and revival."

I have already referred at the beginning of this chapter to the breakdown of the old nationalistic types of religion which marked the Hellenistic period and was characteristic of the epoch dating from the time of Alexander the Great. Religion became cosmopolitan and individualistic.

Notable was the wide diffusion of the Isis-Serapis mystery-cult. This was known at Rome in the first century B.C., and later became widespread. It is an interesting example of the syncretistic tendencies which were at work. Serapis, according to the predominant view held among scholars, is a name compounded of the two names Osiris-Apis — *i.e.*, the Apis of Memphis transformed into Osiris — and is to be regarded as a syncretistic deity, intended to fuse together Greek

and Egyptian religious ideas. This cult, which probably included the Isis mysteries referred to by Plutarch, was brought into contact with the Greek world by the first Ptolemy. It was part of his far-seeing political outlook to make religion one of his instruments in fusing together his Greek and Egyptian subjects. For this purpose he introduced into Alexandria—practically virgin soil—the cult of Serapis. According to an old tradition, reported by Plutarch, Ptolemy summoned one of the hierarchs of Eleusis—viz., Timotheus, to consult with him as to the character of the new divinity. The new cult does, indeed, seem to have been formed by a combination of Osiris-worship and elements derived from the Eleusinian mysteries. And so it came about that Osiris, "the Lord of life and death, the final arbiter of human destiny," was surrounded with the halo of the Greek mysteries. Though this composite cult was not welcomed by the native priesthood of Egypt, and, in fact, never apparently got a strong hold on the old native Egyptian population, it had a wonderful success, as I have already pointed out, outside the

boundaries of Egypt. Commenting on this fact, Mr. Legge says:

"Ptolemy . . . was building better than he knew, and the hybrid cult, which the provident old soldier had fashioned as an instrument of government, turned out to be the first, and not the least successful, of the world-religions for which Alexander's conquests left clear the way. During the wars of the Diadochi, all the powers who at any time found themselves Ptolemy's pawns in the mighty war-game then played on a board stretching from India to Thrace, thought to curry favour with their rich ally by giving countenance to his new religion. An association of . . . worshippers of Serapis held their meetings in the Piræus not long after the institution of the Alexandrian cult; and before the death of Ptolemy Soter a Serapæum was built in Athens over against the Acropolis itself. Cyprus, Rhodes, Antioch, Smyrna, and Halicarnassus were not long in following suit, and before the end of the century several islands of the Ægean, together with Bœotia, which was said by some to be the native country of Dionysus, had

adopted the new worship. In the second century B.C. the temples of the Alexandrian gods were to be found in Delos, Tenedos, Thessaly, Macedonia, and the Thracian Bosphorus in Europe, and in Ephesus, Cyzicus, and Termessus among other places in Asia Minor." A hundred years before our era a Serapæum was in existence at Puteoli. It had reached Rome by 80 B.C., though several attempts were made to suppress it. "Under the Empire," writes Mr. Legge, "the temple of Isis in the Campus Martius became one of the fashionable resorts of the Roman youth, and although Tiberius seized the occasion of a real or pretended scandal in connection with it to exile a number of the faithful to Sardinia, his successors were themselves initiated into the faith, while under Nero the worship of the Alexandrian gods was formally recognized by the State. From that time it followed the Roman arms into every quarter of the ancient world, and its monuments have been found in Morocco, Spain, France, Great Britain, Germany, and the Danube provinces. Ridicule was as powerless to stop its march as persecution, and

the satire of Juvenal and Martial had no more effect upon it than the banter of the new Comedy, which was quick to observe that even in Menander's day the gilded youth of Athens swore "by Isis" or "by Horus." Under the Antonines it probably reached its apogee, when the Emperor Commodus appeared in the processions of the cult among the bearers of the sacred images, and few Romans seem to have been aware that the Alexandrian gods were not Roman from the beginning. Like Ptolemy's master, Ptolemy's gods might have boasted that they commanded the allegiance of the whole civilized world."*

The Isis-Serapis worship was, as we have seen, itself the product of syncretistic tendencies, and was a powerful agent in further developments of the same tendency. In Apuleius' romance Isis announces herself to Lucius as "queen of all the elements, earliest offspring of the ages, highest of godheads, sovereign of the Manes, first of the

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* *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity,* I., 53 *f.*

heavenly ones, one-formed type of gods and goddesses." "The luminous heights of heaven," she proceeds, "the health-giving breezes of the sea, the sad silences of the lower world I govern by my nod. I am she whose god-head, single in essence, but of many forms, with varied rites and under many names, the whole earth reveres. Hence the Phrygians, first-born of men, call me Pessinuntica, Mother of the Gods; here the first inhabitants of Attica, Cecropian Minerva. There the wave-rocked Cypriotes, Paphian Venus; the arrow-bearing Cretans, Diana Dictynna; the three-tongued Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine; the Eleusinians, the ancient goddess Ceres — others Juno, others Bellona, these Hecate, these Rhamnusia; and they who are lighted by the first rays of the sun-god on his rising, the Ethiopians, the Africans, and the Egyptians skilled in the ancient teaching, worshipping me with ceremonies peculiarly my own, call me by my true name, Queen Isis."

The tendency of these cults was in the direction of what has been called a monotheistic pantheism.

Serapis appears as exhibiting a type of godlike character which made an irresistible appeal. He is hailed as the god who is "the protector and saviour of all men," "the most loving of the gods towards men," the one god who is ready to assist man in his need when man invokes him.

How genuinely religious the worship connected with Isis and Serapis could be can be illustrated, perhaps, by the beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to Queen Isis uttered by Lucius after his initiation into the Isis mysteries, as reported by Apuleius. It runs as follows, and is doubtless taken from an actual liturgy:

"Thou who art the holy and eternal Saviour of mankind, ever bountiful to the mortals who cherish thee, thou bestowest thy gracious mother-love upon the wretched in their misfortunes. No day . . . no brief moment ever passes without thy benefits. On land and sea thou watchest over men, and holdest out to them thy saving right hand, dispelling the storms of life. Thou dost undo the hopelessly ravelled threads of Fate, and dost alleviate the tempests of Fortune and restrainest the

hurtful courses of the stars. . . . As for me my spirit is too feeble to render thee worthy praise, and my possessions too small to bring thee fitting sacrifices. I have no fluency of speech to put into words that which I feel of thy majesty. Therefore will I essay to do that which alone a poor but pious worshipper can: Thy divine countenance, and thy most holy presence will I hide within the shrine of my heart: there will I guard thee, and continually keep thee before my spirit."

We turn now to consider what is perhaps the most interesting and important of the Oriental religions which were active in the religious struggle during the early centuries of our era—the religion of Mithra.

By the time the cult of Mithra invaded the Roman Empire it had, of course, passed through a long history. The Mithraism revealed to us by the inscriptions and monuments of the Roman period had been largely modified and partially transformed by contact with external influences. The probable early history of the god has been conveniently summarized by Mr. Phythian-Adams as follows:

1. Mitra or Mithra was from earliest times worshipped both by the Indians and Persians as a god of light, with (if any) only secondary ethical aspects. He is at this stage almost invariably coupled with another god (originally Ruler of the Sky) Varuna or Ahura, the two being regarded as soverigns and co-creators of the Universe. It is in this primitive form that Mitra appears in Northern Mesopotamia about the fourteenth century B.C., as a national god of the Mitanni.

2. The Iranian Mithra in the course of Persian conquests underwent an internal and an external transformation. He became (*a*) the God of Truth, the warlike defender of the Righteous; and (*b*) an equivalent of the Babylonian Shamash, who dowered him with all the lore of Chaldæan astrology.

3. The later Archæmenid monarchs, ignorant or impatient of Zoroastrianism, which had degraded their favourite god into the rank of a genie, restored him to his original place by the side of Ahura Mazda.

4. After the conquests and death of Alexander,

Mithra is found in Pontus Armenia, Cappadocia, and Commagene. The kings of these States, who boasted of their Achæmenid descent, were careful to preserve the religion of their fathers and displayed their devotion to the god by frequently incorporating his name in their own—*e.g.*, Mithridates. In this period Mithraism became connected with, but not assimilated to, the Anatolian cults of Ma and Atys, Men, Sabazius, etc.

It is a remarkable fact that Rome, which had in 204 B.C. welcomed the Great Mother of the Gods from Pessinus, had tolerated the worship of Isis and Serapis for a century before the Christian era, and had recognized other Oriental deities like the Cappadocian Bellona, was still ignorant of the Persian worship, and was not to hear much about it till the Empire had been established for a century. The explanation of this fact is to be found in the inaccessibility of the regions where the Mithraic worship was established. The Anatolian highlands were then, as now, difficult to approach and penetrate. In these regions the Iranian princes of Asia Minor practised the ancient rites of their

religion unmolested by the world. According to Plutarch the Roman first learnt of Mithra from the pirates who were subdued by Pompey in 67 B.C.—the pirates had themselves been in the service of Mithridates—but the real invasion of the Roman world by the cult of Mithra came later. It is a striking fact, pointed out by Cumont, that Mithra practically made no impression upon the Hellenic world. "The ancient authors of Greece speak of him only as a foreign God, worshipped by the Kings of Persia. And this is almost equally true of the Hellenistic period, from the time of Alexander, when so many exotic cults had penetrated into the Greek world. The name of Mithra does not enter any of the theophorous or god-bearing names which were formed in such abundance in Hellenic or Hellenized countries in connection with other Oriental cults.

"Although the Thracian Bendis," says Cumont, "the Asian Cybele, the Serapis of the Alexandrians, and even the Syrian Baals were successively received with favour in the cities of Greece, that country never extended the hand of hospi-

tality to the tutelary deity of its ancient enemies."

The Mithraic cult had its seat in a part of the world that long resisted Hellenic influence, and largely lay outside the frontiers of the Roman Empire. Where the hand of Rome had fallen—as in the conquest of the province of Cilicia in 102 B.C.—the country had not been fully conquered till a later time. In fact, places like Western Pontus, Commagene, and lesser Armenia, were not definitely incorporated in the Empire till the Flavian period. Then, and not till then, were permanent relations established between these remote provinces and the rest of the Empire. Certain military needs—the establishment of three legions along the frontier of the Euphrates — and later the expeditions and conquests of Trajan, Lucius Verus, and Septimius Severus in the East set up communications between Mithraism and the old-established parts of the Empire which resulted in the diffusion of the cult in the Latin world.

From the Flavian period Mithraism began to be well known in the Roman world. About the beginning of the reign of Vespasian the cult was

brought by the 15th Legion to Carnuntum on the Danube, which remained one of its most important centres. By the end of the first century it had penetrated into Northern Italy; about the middle of the second century it was practised by the troops in Germany. Under the Antonines, especially from the reign of Commodus, the proofs of its presence abound in all countries, and at the end of the second century its mysteries were celebrated in at least four temples at Ostia. The widespread diffusion of the cult is proved by its monuments, which abound from the shores of the Black Sea to the mountains of Scotland and to the borders of the Sahara desert along the whole line of the Roman frontiers. Its final phase was reached in the third and fourth centuries when, under imperial patronage, it seemed on the point of becoming a world-religion. It was in A.D. 307 that Diocletian, Galerius, and Licinius, meeting in conference at Carnuntum, dedicated an altar to Mithras *fautori imperii sui* (the Patron of their Empire) in one of the most ancient centres of the cult in the Empire; but the victory of Constantine

altered the situation. Mithraism lost the imperial patronage, which was now given to a rival creed—that of Christianity (A.D. 313). With the loss of its privileged position it gradually sank to one of tolerance, and finally with persecution was at last rooted out by the victorious Christian faith. The causes of its rapid diffusion in the earlier period are not hard to determine. It was primarily spread by the legions of the Roman army, especially by those which had been recruited in the remote regions where the cult of Mithra was most firmly rooted. These recruits included large numbers drawn from Cappadocia, Pontus, and Cilicia, and even Parthia.

"The Roman soldier," says Cumont, "was, as a rule, pious, and even superstitious. The many perils to which he was exposed caused him to seek unremittingly the protection of Heaven, and an incalculable number of dedicatory inscriptions bears witness both to the vivacity of his faith and to the variety of his beliefs. The Orientals especially, transported for twenty years and more into countries which were totally strange to them,

piously preserved the memories of their national divinities, and whenever the opportunity offered, they did not fail to assemble for the purposes of rendering them devotion. They had experienced the need of conciliating the great lord (Baal), whose anger as little children they had learned to fear. Their worship also offered an occasion for reunion, and for recalling to memory, under the gloomy climates of the North, their distant country. But their brotherhoods were not exclusive; they gladly admitted to their rites those of their companions in arms, of whatever origin, whose aspirations the official religion of the army failed to satisfy, and who hoped to obtain from the foreign god more efficacious succour in their combats, or in case of death a happier lot in the life to come. Afterwards, these neophytes, transferred to other garrisons, according to the exigencies of the service or the necessities of war, from converts became converters, and formed about them a new nucleus of proselytes. In this manner, the mysteries of Mithra, first brought to Europe by semi-barbarian recruits from Cappadocia or Comma-

gene, were rapidly disseminated to the utmost confines of the ancient world."

But the influence of the army will not account for all the facts. Other agencies were at work of a non-military character which helped to diffuse the Mithraic religion. These operated especially in the towns and country districts of the provinces in which no troops were stationed. The Roman peace led to the opening up of great trade routes throughout the Empire, and a cosmopolitan commercial class, drawn from the Semitic provinces largely, sprang up which concentrated in its hands the entire traffic of the Levant. These Syrians had their colonies dotted along all the shores of the Mediterranean, and their activities extended also much farther—up the valley of the Danube and in Gaul. Under the Merovingians they still spoke their Semitic idiom at Orleans, and I believe the dialect of Malta to this day has a large Semitic admixture. Wherever these people settled they established their national cults. Some of these 'Syrian' settlers coming from the Euphrates and beyond were worshippers of Mithra, though the

more important and the more numerous were worshippers of Semitic Baals. A large number of slaves were imported from the Asiatic provinces, and these, with the Syrian merchants, introduced Oriental cults and particularly that of Mithra. Another class, too, who were not free men, embracing what we should describe as the lower ranks of the civil service (collectors of taxes, treasurers, clerks of all kinds, and functionaries), played a great part in the diffusion of foreign religions, and among them were many devotees of Mithra. They have been described as "the apostles of the universal religions as opposed to the local cults."

It is impossible within the short space at our disposal to describe in detail the elaborate organization, both external and internal, of the Mithraic worship, even if full and complete knowledge on all points were available. But some slight description of the main features must be attempted.

The Mithraic Temple was designed to suggest a cave (*spelæum, specus*), a rock-hewn vaulted chamber, and was, where possible, constructed

underground. Where this was for some reason impossible, an artificial construction was arranged to suggest descent into a cave. The innermost sanctuary could only be approached through a series of intermediate rooms. The actual entrance was by a series of descending steps, and in a complete *mithræum* was surrounded on the outside by a pronaos or cloister with a colonnade. The intervening rooms included a sacristy or apparatorum where the actors in the sacred drama put on their special costumes, and a vestibule. The actual chapel consisted of a central aisle about 8 ft. broad flanked on either side by benches or platforms. The central aisle was presumably intended for the mystic masquerade and other services of the cult. At Ostia seven semicircles inscribed upon the pavement indicated that the planets were here invoked; and here also animal sacrifices took place. At the end of the chapel was the apse containing the sacred images. It may be noted that these Mithraic chapels were, as a rule, quite small, affording room for barely fifty worshippers. In the apse stood the grand bas-relief,

which is the most striking and impressive feature of the Mithraic monuments, of the young god slaughtering the bull. Before this were usually fixed two or more altars, and to the right and left the statues of the two torch-bearers or Dadophoroi. In some shrines a sort of chancel-rail separated off the relief. A water-stoup was also a usual feature, and great importance was attached to securing a water supply for ritual purposes. The scene depicted on the great bas-relief is thus described by Mr. Phythian-Adams:*

"Under the rocky vault of a cavern the young and beautiful god has forced his quarry—*i.e.*, the bull—to the ground. Kneeling on its back and pressing his right foot on its hind-leg, he drags back the head by grasping a horn or fixing his fingers in the nostrils, while he plunges his knife into the neck above the right shoulder. His dress on the reliefs is almost always the same; he is clad in the tunic and breeches which typified 'Asia' to the Western world, with a short cloak

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* *Mithraism.*

which floats out behind him. On his flowing locks is the familiar 'Phrygian' cap. His face is often turned to the spectator, or over the right shoulder, and wears an indescribable expression of mingled grief, exaltation, and fear." Besides the Dadophoroi, "whose rôle appears to be that of melancholy onlookers, the Sun himself looks down upon the sacrifice and darts a ray into the gloom of the cavern. A dog and a snake advance from opposite directions to drink the spurting blood, while a scorpion, sometimes with an ant, absorbs the seed of the victim. Meanwhile, perched on a rocky height, or even upon the . . . mantle of the god, a crow sits watching the mysterious scene."

The general significance of this picture has been the subject of much speculation. Its governing motif — which apparently goes back to an ancient Iranian myth of creation in connection with the death of the primeval ox which signalized the springing into existence of grain and plant-life—seems to be that the death of the bull brings life and fertility to the earth. Other subordinate features were sometimes added. But one scene,

which is sometimes represented on a separate monument, owing to its peculiar importance in the cult, depicts the birth of Mithra, who rises as a naked child from a parent rock, holding in his hands a knife and a torch.

Mithra himself appears to have been originally a god of the heavenly light; his birth from the rock may symbolize the appearance of the dawn on the mountaintops, or the effulgence of light from the vault of heaven. The two torch-bearers dressed in the same Oriental costume as the god himself, holding one torch aloft and the other reversed, apparently represent the rising and setting sun. From the fact that the signs of the zodiac are commonly depicted as a framework of the Relief, and in other ways, and that busts of sun and moon, together with pictures of the planets, and emblems of the seasons, winds, and other elements appear, it is reasonably certain that in the Mithraic mysteries "a complete system of cosmography was taught." Unfortunately, we have no text of a genuine Mithraic liturgy, for it is extremely doubtful whether the document pub-

lished by Dieterich as such is anything more than a text illustrating the syncretistic tendencies of the age. But it is probable that the ascent of the soul through the seven spheres was taught in these mysteries. It is at any rate clear that astrology had deeply influenced Mithraic doctrine.

According to Cumont, Mithra, in his migrations, was accompanied by other deities of the Mazdæan pantheon, at the head of which stood the Supreme Being, who is represented as a Mithraic Kronos, in the likeness of a human monster, with the head of a lion, and his body enveloped by a serpent. He was considered ineffable, bereft of name, sex, and passions. Mithraism, as we meet it in the West, assigned to Mithra a rôle which made his cult very attractive. The ancient conception of the god assigned him a zone situated midway between Heaven and Hell, and for this reason the name μεσίτης or "mediator" was given to him. Doubtless, his identification with the Babylonian Shamash or "Sun-God" helped to stereotype this idea, for according to the Chaldean doctrines the sun occupied the middle

place in the planetary choir. But the middle position was also invested with a moral significance. Mithra was regarded as the "mediator" between the unapproachable and unknowable god who reigned in the ethereal spheres and the human race struggling and suffering here below. As such he had been entrusted with a terrestrial mission, which included the guardianship of the first human pair, whose existence was threatened by the spirit of Evil. The labours of Mithra were embodied in a series of heroic exploits which numbered among them the conquest of the sun, regarded henceforth as the god's ally and friend. At the conclusion of these toils Mithra, "in a last supper," which the initiated commemorated by mystical love-feasts, celebrated with Helios and the other companions of his labours the termination of their common struggles. Then the gods ascended to the heavens. "Borne by the Sun on his radiant quadriga, Mithra crossed the Ocean, which sought in vain to engulf him, and took up his habitation with the rest of the immortals, and from the heights of heaven he

never ceases to protect the faithful who piously serve him."

Mithra was thus conceived as a sort of Logos, to whom the supreme deity had committed the task of establishing order in nature. The conflict between good and evil still raged in the universe, both above and below. Life is a warfare in which these forces are ever in conflict. The followers of Mithra were pledged to certain moral obligations, the carrying out of which would enable them to fight a good fight. "Their dualistic system," says Cumont, "was particularly adapted to fostering individual effort, and to developing human energy. They did not lose themselves, as did the other sects, in contemplative mysticism; for them the good dwelt in action. They rated strength higher than gentleness, and preferred courage to lenity. . . . A religion of soldiers, Mithraism exalted the military virtues above all others. In the warfare against evil and sin which his devotees waged they could always invoke — and never in vain — the help of Mithra. His mighty aid could assure his soldiers of victory both against earthly and

unearthly foes, salvation, deliverance, redemption, both in this world and in the world to come."

In a world where moral anarchy reigned, the vigour of its ethical system undoubtedly was a force that appealed to many. It bound together its elect in one great army. It also, in its assimilation of astrological ideas, which formed a sort of reconciliation between the science and religion of the time, appealed to the educated.

Another side of Mithraism was important. It helped to furnish a doctrinal basis for the Emperor-worship which gradually assumed new and startling forms. It was only when Oriental ideas had, through the influx of the Oriental religions, triumphed over and submerged ancient Roman ideas that the apotheosis of the living ruler was acquiesced in without serious protest by the Roman people. According to Persian ideas the ruler reigned by grace of the Supreme Being. And this grace was conceived as a sort of dazzling fire or nimbus of divine glory which illuminated the legitimate sovereign, but withdrew itself from usurpers. "The monarch upon whom this divine

grace descended was lifted above ordinary mortals, and revered by his subjects as a peer of the gods." After the downfall of their native dynasties this veneration was transferred by their Asiatic subjects to the Roman Emperors. From the reign of Commodus (A.D. 180-192), when the influence of Oriental ideas had become powerful, the Emperors officially assumed the titles of *pius, felix,* and *invictus,* which remained a permanent part of their official designations. Here *felix* probably reflects the idea of εὐτυχής (fortunate) — *i.e.,* he is illuminated by the divine grace. *Invictus* was an epithet specially associated with the sun which, as chief of the planetary bodies, was arbiter of the Fortune of Kings. "In assuming the epithet *invictus,* invincible, the Cæsars formally announced the intimate alliance which they had contracted with the sun." Another epithet borne by the solar divinities of the Orient—viz., "eternal," became also part of their official titles. Thus it came to pass that the Emperor was conceived as having a share in the divinity of the royal star, of which he was the representative on earth.

It was an alliance between the throne and the altar of which the Cæsars dreamed, and it was the priests of Serapis, of Baal, and of Mithra who prepared the way for this by preaching the doctrine of the divine right of kings. In its original form this project was wrecked by the hostility of the Christians. Nevertheless, by a strange irony the Church was destined to realize in another form the idea for which the pagan rulers of the third century had worked. Under the form of an Established Church, protected by a Christian Emperor, the fateful alliance between Church and State, between altar and throne, became a fact, the influence of which is patent to the world to-day.

The syncretism which was so marked a characteristic of the third and fourth centuries is illustrated by the later phase of Mithraism, and especially by its relations to other cults. In particular, an alliance was formed between the cults of Mithra and the Great Mother. Political reasons may have helped to make this expedient. By such an alliance the followers of Mithra obtained the support of a powerful and officially recognized

clergy, and so shared in some measure in the protection afforded it by the State. They also complemented each other. Since men only were admitted to the Mithraic mysteries, it was natural that other mysteries to which women were admitted should be associated in the movements of the time. The Great Mother had her "Maters," or Mothers, just as Mithra had his "Fathers," and the Initiates were known among each other as "sisters" in the one case, just as they were called "brothers" in the other.

Mithraism, in the fourth century, was aiming at "the union of all gods and all myths in a vast synthesis—the foundation of a new religion in harmony with the prevailing philosophy and political constitution of the Empire. . . . Breaking with the Roman principle of the nationality of worship it would have established the universal domination of Mithra identified with the invincible Sun. Its adherents," says Cumont, "hoped by concentrating all their devotion upon a single object to impart new cohesion to the disintegrated beliefs Solar pantheism was the last refuge of conserva-

tive spirits now menaced by a revolutionary propaganda that aimed at the annihilation of the entire ancient order of things."

Christianity and Mithraism had spread to the Roman Empire at about the same time; the same reasons favoured their diffusion—viz., the political unity and moral anarchy of the Empire. Both were Eastern religions in origin, which knew how to win their way to the West. Both soon realized that they were engaged in a life and death struggle, and discovered with a shock of amazement the similarities of certain rites which they shared. Justin Martyr, referring to the Eucharist, says: "The devils had by way of imitation introduced this very solemnity into the mysteries of Mithra; for you may know that when anyone is initiated into this religion, bread and a cup of water with a certain form of words are made use of in the sacrifice." Tertullian also refers to the same sort of similarity in a similar way. The duel was waged between the two adversaries with implacable fury —for the prize was the dominion of the world. We know the result. Mithraism, when it seemed

to be on the point of victory, lost the imperial patronage and sank to the position, first of a tolerated and then of a persecuted sect. Its collapse in any case was inevitable sooner or later, for in Christianity it met a rival braced by moral struggle and still fresh in glorious youth endowed with high moral enthusiasm and the sense of conquering mission. The words of the last representative of solar pantheism, the gallant and ill-fated Julian —the pathetic champion of a lost cause—still ring out as the epitaph on that vanished ancient world, and its last grim struggle: "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean."

APPENDIX

THE following passage from Dr. Barker's essay in *The Legacy of Rome* admirably sets forth the fundamental conception underlying the Emperor-worship:

"The general religious reformation of the Augustan age inspired Virgil: it had little abiding result in the mass. But the worship of the deified ruler continued and grew. Caligula and Nero pretended to a present divinity; but generally the emperor was elevated to the rank of *divus,* and made the object of a cult, after his death; and during his life it was his *genius* which was held to be sacred. Here was found the basis of allegiance. The oath of officials and soldiers was associated with the *genius* of the present emperor and the *divi Cæsares* of the past. When the new dynasty of the Flavii succeeded to the Julian Dynasty in A.D. 70, it sought to prove its legitimacy by assuming a similar divinity. Magistrates of Roman towns in the provinces took an oath to the divinity of Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus:

Domitian made the residence of the Flavian family (much as Augustus had done with his house on the Palatine) into a shrine served by a college of *Flaviales;* and, as in Egypt under the Ptolemies,* the women of the family received consecration along with the men. The deification of the emperor, and the allegiance which he receives in virtue of his divinity, are obviously the foundation, or at any rate the cement, of the empire. 'In this cult,' writes Wendland, 'with its peculiar mixture of patriotic and religious feeling, there was found a common expression, which served as a bond of union, for that membership of the empire which was shared by parts so different in nationality and in religion: it was the token and symbol of imperial unity.' The empire was, in effect, a politico-ecclesiastical institution. It was a

* Vespasian was first proclaimed Emperor at Alexandria while he was in Judæa. His first act as Emperor was to occupy Egypt; and here he wrought a supposed miracle of healing by the royal touch.

Church as well as a State: if it had not been both, it would have been alien from the ideas of the ancient world. A city-state entailed a civic worship; an empire-state entailed an empire-worship, and an empire-worship, in turn—granted the existence of a personal emperor, and granted, too, the need for a personal symbol in a State so much larger and so much less tangible than a city-state which could be personalized itself — entailed the worship of an emperor. It is not irrelevant or disproportionate to linger over this aspect of the Roman Empire. If it had not shown this aspect to its subjects it would not have been an empire; for it would not have been a coherent society united by a common will."

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

B.C.

336. Assassination of Philip of Macedon and accession of Alexander.

335. Alexander in Thrace and Illyria.

334. Alexander starts on his Persian campaign. Battle of Granicus.

333. Battle of Issus. Conquest of Cilicia. The Greek era begins.

332. Siege and capture of Tyre. Alexander conquers Egypt.

331. Foundation of Alexandria. Settlement of Syria. Alexander occupies Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis.

330. Alexander at Ecbatana.

327. Alexander invades India.

323. Alexander at Babylon. He dies there.

319. Syria annexed by Ptolemy.

313. Ptolemy crushes revolt in Cyprus.

312. Seleucus establishes himself in Babylon.

310. Ptolemy makes Cyprus an Egyptian possession.

301. Battle of Ipsus. Death of Antigonus.

300-250. Date of the author of Chronicles.

285-247. Ptolemy II. Philadelphus.

247-222. Ptolemy III. Euergetes.

223-187. Antiochus III. the Great, King of Syria.

B.C.

203. Capture of Jerusalem by Antiochus. (Jerusalem under domination, or suzerainty, of Syria for about a century from this date).

187-175. Seleucus IV. Philopator, King of Syria.

180. Composition of Ecclesiasticus (?) (Ben Sira).

175. Accession of Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria.

168. *Abomination of Desolation* set up in the Temple of Jerusalem.

166-5. Revolt of the Jews: victories of Judas Maccabæus, and re-dedication of the Temple.

161. Defeat and death of Judas at Eleasa.

158-142. Jonathan, brother of Judas, head of the Jewish revolt.

146. Carthage destroyed by the Romans.

142. Assassination of Jonathan.

142-135. Simon, brother of Jonathan, succeeds.

132. Translation of Ben Sira into Greek.

135-105. John Hyrcanus, head of Jewish State.

109-108. Hyrcanus destroys Shechem and the Samaritan temple on Gerizim.

105. Aristobulus I., King of Judæa.

104-78. Alexander Jannæus, King of Judæa.

78-69. Salome Alexandra, Queen of Judæa.

68-63. Hyrcanus II., and Aristobulus II. Civil War.

B.C.

63. Intervention of the Romans. Jerusalem surrenders to Pompey.
48. Cæsar defeats Pompey at Pharsalus.
44. Assassination of Cæsar.
40. Herod the Great, son of the Idumæan Antipater, recognized by the Roman senate as dependent King of Judæa.

B.C. A.D.

27-14. Augustus. Revival of native religions in Rome.

A.D.

14-37. Tiberius. Persecution of Isis cult.
c. 40. Philo at Alexandria.
41-54. Claudius.
50. Christian Church established at Rome.
50-220. Gnosticism.
54-68. Nero.
64. Burning of Rome. Persecution of Christianity. (?) Martyrdom of St. Paul.
70. Fall of Jerusalem.
80-100. The "Didache."
96. Second persecution of Christianity.
100. Josephus died.
115. Third persecution of Christianity.
117-138. Hadrian. Mithraism powerful.
160-220. Tertullian.
177. Fourth persecution of Christianity under Marcus Aurelius.
180. Fifth persecution.
193-211. Septimius Severus. Isis, Osiris, Mithra worship current.

A.D.

202. Tertullian joins the Montanists.
202-232. Origen mainly at Cæsarea.
211-217. Caracalla. Universal citizenship in Empire.
235. Sixth persecution (Theban Legion). Attack on clergy.
250. Seventh persecution.
250 Plotinus. Neo-Platonism.
258. Eighth persecution.
261-268. Gallienus. Proclaimed toleration for Christianity.
270-275. Aurelian. Ninth persecution (so called).
284-305. Diocletian. Division of the Empire.
303. Final persecution.
312. Battle of Milvian Bridge.
312-323. Licinius (East) and Constantine (West).
313. Edict of Milan gives toleration to Christianity which becomes the favoured religion of the Empire.
323-337. Constantine. Constantinople becomes capital of Empire.
325. Council of Nicæa. Arian controversy begins.
336. First exile of Athanasius.
337. Arius dies.
340. Eusebius of Cæsarea, historian and semi-Arian dies.
361. Julian. Restoration of Paganism.
362. Fourth exile of Athanasius.
363. Jovian. Restoration of Christianity.

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